IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT EASTERN DISTRICT OF MICHIGAN SOUTHERN DIVISION

)
In Re: AUTOMOTIVE PARTS) 12-md-02311
ANTITRUST LITIGATION) Honorable Marianne O. Battan
)
In re: All Auto Parts Cases) 2:12-md-02311-MOB-MKM
)
THIS RELATES TO:)
THIS RELEATED TO.)
ALL AUTO PARTS CASES)
)
)
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)

DEFENDANTS' REPLY IN SUPPORT OF
THEIR OBJECTIONS TO THE SPECIAL MASTER'S ORDER
COMPELLING THE OEMS TO PRODUCE CONFIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT
AGREEMENTS AND PRIVILEGED SETTLEMENT COMMUNICATIONS

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I. The Special Master's Decision Must Be Reversed Under Any Standard Of Review.

ADPs¹ incorrectly argue for deferential review. ADP Opp. 2-3. The Court reviews de novo issues of law or fact like the application of the settlement privilege and the scope of the Master's authority. See Fed. R. Civ. P. 53(f)(3), (4); United States v. Hayes, 227 F.3d 578, 581 (6th Cir. 2000) (reviewing *de novo* the "analysis of the contours of the psychotherapist/patient privilege"); Ross v. City of Memphis, 423 F.3d 596, 600 (6th Cir. 2005) (application of privilege is a "mixed question of law and fact"); Sukumar v. Direct Focus, Inc., 349 F. App'x 163, 165 (9th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (reviewing de novo "legal conclusions as to the scope of the special master's Rule 53 authority"). The Court reviews the Master's decision as to settlement agreements de novo because (a) the Master never addressed relevance or other required factors, such as the impact of disclosure on settlement negotiations; and (b) "the issue of relevance is a legal question." In re Vitamins Antitrust Litig., 198 F.R.D. 296, 298 (D.D.C. 2000); EEOC v. United Air Lines, Inc., 287 F.3d 643, 654 (7th Cir. 2002) (applying de novo standard where court below "failed to address the issue of relevance"). In any event, a master abuses his discretion when he "applies the law improperly, or uses an erroneous legal standard." Garner v. Cuyahoga Cnty. Juvenile Court, 554 F.3d 624, 634 (6th Cir. 2009). Under any standard, the Master's legal errors compel reversal.

II. The Special Master Erred In Ordering The OEMs To Produce Confidential Settlement Agreements With Suppliers, Including Defendants.

A. The Master exceeded his authority. In four pages of argument, ADPs do not identify any written or oral argument for or against the production of settlement agreements made before the Master ruled. ADP Opp. 14-17. Accordingly, the Master exceeded his authority to resolve *only* the disputes put before him. Defs. Obj. 9-10.

¹ Only the Automobile Dealership Plaintiffs ("ADPs"), not the other Moving Plaintiffs, oppose Defendants' objections. *See* ECF Nos. 1680, 1681 ("ADP Opp.") 1 n.1. Capitalized terms, including "Ex. _", have the meaning in Defendants' objections (ECF No. 1650) ("Defs. Obj.").

B. The settlement agreements are irrelevant to ADPs' claims. ADPs do not cite, and Defendants are unaware of, *any* antitrust case in which an indirect purchaser successfully compelled production of a settlement agreement with a non-party direct purchaser, for the very good reason that such settlement agreements are irrelevant to indirect purchaser claims. Defs. Obj. 12; *see* ADP Opp. 17-18. ADPs' *post hoc* attempts to demonstrate relevance otherwise fail.

ADPs vaguely argue that the settlement agreements would somehow "shed light on practices and mechanics of OEMs' commercial relationship with their suppliers, an ongoing, sometimes decades-long relationship that defined how parts contracts were bid out, negotiated, awarded and modified and that was at the center of this conspiracy." ADP Opp. 17. But ADPs never explain how *settlement agreements* would "shed [any] light" on any of those things, and Defendants have demonstrated that they will not. Defs. Obj. 11-12.

ADPs then state that they need settlement agreements to learn how "collusive rates were modified or re-negotiated after disclosure" of the misconduct. ADP Opp. 17. But ADPs do not need settlement agreements to show price changes in the "post-collusion" period because that information is available from an alternative source: Defendants' and OEMs' transactional data. Further, the typical settlement agreement would call for a lump sum payment to the OEM to resolve the OEM's claims and thus would provide none of the information ADPs claim to seek.

ADPs next speculate that settlement agreements might be relevant to show OEM bias. ADP Opp. 17. But a settlement agreement may be discoverable to show witness bias only when the moving party (1) identifies a particular witness who will in fact testify and (2) shows how that witness could be biased by the settlement. Defs. Obj. 12. ADPs make no such showing.

Finally, ADPs argue that the settlement agreements can be used to "inform Plaintiffs' decisions as to what to request" during discovery. ADP Opp. 18. Once again, ADPs offer no

explanation for how settlement agreements would enlighten them about what discovery to seek. And discovery is proper only if relevant to a "claim or defense" in litigation. Fed. R. Civ. P. 26(b)(1). ADPs' desire to review settlement agreements to formulate a discovery strategy is insufficient as a matter of law. *Cf. Jeld-Wen, Inc. v. Agc Am., Inc. (In re Flat Glass Antitrust Litig.)*, 2013 WL 1703864, at *1 (W.D. Pa. Apr. 19, 2013) ("relevance to settlement negotiations is not relevant to the subject matter of the action, as contemplated by applicable rules and standards").

C. Compelled production of the agreements will impede future settlements. ADPs claim that it "strains credulity" that compelled disclosure would cause parties to choose to litigate rather than settle. ADP Opp. 19. But Defendants' concern is not that the parties will no longer want to settle, but that they may not be *able* to settle because they will be dissuaded from compromising for fear of forced disclosure of confidential settlement information. Defs. Obj. 14-15. That concern is real: the Master's order "has already substantially chilled the ability of Nissan and its suppliers to negotiate and memorialize settlements for fear of disclosure to third parties, and counsel for third parties."²

III. The Special Master Erred In Ordering The OEMs To Produce Privileged Settlement Communications.

A. The privilege extends to all communications "in furtherance of settlement." ADPs do not even attempt to defend the Special Master's arbitrary distinction between factual statements made at "initial meetings" about settlement and similar statements made during subsequent discussions. Instead, they simply pretend the Master never drew that distinction. *See, e.g.*, ADP Opp. 9. But the Master did not hold that *all* statements about the underlying facts are discoverable, only those at "initial meetings." Ex. 6, Order ¶ 2; Ex. 3, Tr. 9:7-20. Neither the Master nor ADPs

² Nissan N. Am.'s Further Br. in Supp. Of Certain OEM's Obj. to the Special Master's Order Granting in Part and Denying in Part Certain Serving Parties' Mot. to Compel Prod. In Resp. to Request No. 31 at 2, Case No. 2:12-md-02311-MOB-MKM, ECF No. 1652.

have explained why statements made at the first meeting are categorically not privileged, but similar statements made at the second or third (or later) meetings are privileged. And there is no support for that distinction, as the privilege turns on the *purpose* of the communication, not *when* it was made. Defs. Obj. 18-20.

B. Statements about the underlying facts are at the heart of the privilege. The thrust of ADPs' brief is that statements describing the underlying facts about a conspiracy can never be privileged under *Goodyear* because they do not count as "settlement negotiations." ADP Opp. 5-10. That is wrong: the only relevant question under *Goodyear* is if the communication was "made in furtherance of settlement," Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. v. Chiles Power Supply, Inc., 332 F.3d 976, 983 (6th Cir. 2003), not whether the communication meets ADPs' (unstated) metaphysical definition of "settlement negotiations." Perhaps for that reason, ADPs do not cite a single case and Defendants have not found one—interpreting the settlement privilege to exclude factual admissions about the merits of claims. Goodyear holds that the settlement privilege exists to ensure that settlement communications are "uninhibited," id. at 980, and that rationale applies to factual admissions: "To promote settlement of disputes, there must be full and frank disclosure by each party of his or her position, and the facts on which he or she relies to sustain that position." 2 Weinstein's Federal Evidence § 408.05 (Lexis 2017) (emphasis added). Further, Goodyear's holding that settlement communications are privileged because they are not probative in litigation applies with the most force to factual admissions: "[F]actual representations contained in [a settlement communication] might differ from representations [during litigation] because the context of a settlement demand is very different, and [a party] might have taken a different, potentially inferior position with regard to [the central issue in the case] in that context . . . to negotiate a settlement." *Haley v. Kundu*, 2013 WL 12030021, at *2 (E.D. Tenn. Apr. 11, 2013).

Cases applying Rule 408, upon which *Goodyear* relied in recognizing the settlement privilege, confirm that the privilege extends to descriptions of the underlying facts. For example, in *Eid v. Saint-Gobain Abrasives, Inc.*, 377 F. App'x 438 (6th Cir. 2010) (unpublished), the Sixth Circuit rejected the argument that a settlement communication that contained "discussion of [the defendant's] internal investigation f[ell] outside the scope of Rule 408 merely because it contained factual admissions." *Id.* at 444. The Court ruled that the letter in question was "exactly the type of admission that falls within the scope of Rule 408." *Id.* at 445. In so holding, the Court relied upon the same policy rationales that undergird the *Goodyear* settlement privilege. *Id.* at 444 (quoting *Goodyear*, 332 F.3d at 981). Other cases similarly have held that Rule 408 applies to factual admissions made to further settlement discussions.³ As another court aptly stated, "it does not matter that the statements involved were not actually offers but rather facts proffered about the dispute." *United States v. Doxie*, 2014 WL 3845699, at *10 (N.D. Ga. Aug. 5, 2014).

ADPs argue that compelling production of settlement communications is in the public interest, ADP Opp. 19-22, but in doing so they ask this Court to ignore binding Sixth Circuit authority. ADPs cite cases from *other circuits* that declined to recognize a settlement privilege at all. ADP Opp. 20 (citing *In re Subpoena Issued to CFTC*, 370 F. Supp. 2d 201 (D.D.C. 2005), and *In re MSTG*, *Inc.*, 675 F.3d 1337 (Fed. Cir. 2012)). But *Goodyear* rejected those courts'

³ See, e.g., Jackson v. O'Reilly Auto. Stores, Inc., 131 F. Supp. 3d 756, 763 (M.D. Tenn. 2015) ("[a]ny factual admissions within the letter are statements made in the effort to compromise," and "Rule 408 precludes introduction"); Haley, 2013 WL 12030021, at *2 (applying Rule 408 to "strictly factual information") (citing Goodyear and Eid); In re Sept. 11 Litig., 621 F. Supp. 2d 131, 164 (S.D.N.Y. 2009) (applying Rule 408 to a document about "the merits of various contentions in the lawsuit"); Nomo Agroindustrial S.A. de C.V. v. Enza Zaden N. Am., Inc., 2009 WL 211085, at *3-4 (D. Ariz. Jan. 29, 2009) (agreeing with a party that "factual statements made during settlement negotiations are clearly within the scope of Rule 408's prohibition"); see also United States ex rel. Underwood v. Genentech, Inc., 2010 WL 8917474, at *1-2 (E.D. Pa. Oct. 7, 2010) (barring discovery of "presentations and letters analyzing facts and damages that were created in connection with settlement negotiations").

reasoning. And even *MSTG* recognized that courts should limit discovery where "allowing broad discovery would undermine other important interests in confidentiality," including "the public policy goals" favoring settlement. *MSTG*, 675 F.3d at 1347. *Goodyear* holds that those public policy interests are paramount in this Circuit.

C. ADPs' other arguments against the privilege fail. ADPs argue that "confidentiality agreements do not preclude discovery" of settlement communications. ADP Opp. 9. They miss the point. Confidentiality agreements *entered into for settlement discussions* can establish the factual predicate for the privilege: that communications made under the agreement were "made in furtherance of settlement" and intended to be confidential. *Goodyear*, 332 F.3d at 983.

ADPs argue that Defendants waived the argument that the Master erred in ordering production *en masse* of documents about "initial meetings" without considering the context of the communications. ADP Opp. 10-11; Defs. Obj. 21-22. But Defendants raised this issue when it first arose. Prior to the Master's ruling, ADPs asked the Master to reject the settlement privilege and order production of *all* documents about negotiations between the OEMs and Defendants—so there was not yet a need for Defendants or the OEMs to address distinctions between the documents. *See* Mot. Compel (ECF Nos. 1188, 1189). When the Master *sua sponte* distinguished between kinds of documents, Defendants properly objected at their first opportunity. *See United States v. Clariot*, 655 F.3d 550, 556 (6th Cir. 2011) ("When a district court resolves an issue, the losing party can challenge it. Otherwise, the more surprising a district court decision in terms of resolving unbriefed and unargued points, the more insulated from review that decision would be.").

Finally, ADPs' claimed need to discover settlement communications, ADP Opp. 1-2, 4, is both irrelevant and overstated. It is irrelevant because "the very nature of a privilege is that it prevents disclosure of information that may be relevant in the case, in order to serve interests that

are of over-arching importance." *Hucko v. City of Oak Forest*, 185 F.R.D. 526, 530 (N.D. III. 1999). It is overstated because ADPs have access to significant information from other sources. Beyond Defendants' voluminous document productions, interrogatory responses, and depositions, ADPs' settlement agreements include robust cooperation obligations, *see*, *e.g.*, Ex. 8, ¶¶ 35-46, and ADPs have information from amnesty applicants pursuant to the Antitrust Criminal Penalty Enhancement and Reform Act of 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-237, tit. II, 118 Stat. 661, 665-69 (2004).

IV. The Special Master Erred In Ordering Production Of Documents Regarding Products As To Which ADPs Have No Pending Case.

ADPs contend that Defendants cannot object to compelled production as to particular parts now because they did not so argue below. ADP Opp. 23. But their proposed order to implement the Master's ruling included this caveat, Ex. 5 \P 8, and ADPs ignore that they have completely settled many cases since Defendants filed their brief below in February 2016.

ADPs argue that they need settlement documents about all parts to see "the full picture." ADP Opp. 23. But ADPs are pursuing claims as to separate conspiracies as to particular parts, and they can only seek information relevant to those separate conspiracies. And this Court has rejected the notion that the conduct affected all parts when it rejected ADPs' motion to consolidate.⁵

CONCLUSION

The Court should sustain Defendants' objections to the Special Master's order.

⁴ Defendants' opening brief also demonstrated that the Master erred because ADPs offered no "legitimate, admissible use" for the information they seek. Defs. Obj. 23-24. ADPs argue that the documents they seek are admissible because they are not about "settlement negotiations" and are relevant to show OEM bias. ADP Opp. 13. Defendants have explained why those points fail. *See supra* pp. 2, 4-5. ADPs also point to Rule 26's statement that evidence need not be admissible to be discoverable. ADP Opp. 12. But *Goodyear* makes clear that principle does not apply to settlement-related documents due to the interplay between the settlement privilege, Federal Rules of Evidence 403 and 408, and Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 26. *See* 332 F.3d at 982-83.

⁵ Op. & Order Denying EPPs' Mot. To Consol. Claims & Amend Complts. & ADPs' Mot. To Consol. Claims & Amend Complts., Case No. 2:13-cv-0702-MOB-MKM, ECF No. 83.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on March 1, 2017, I caused a copy of DEFENDANTS' REPLY IN SUPPORT OF THEIR OBJECTIONS TO THE SPECIAL MASTER'S ORDER COMPELLING THE OEMS TO PRODUCE CONFIDENTIAL SETTLEMENT AGREEMENTS AND PRIVILEGED SETTLEMENT COMMUNICATIONS to be electronically filed with the Clerk of the Court using the CM/ECF system, which will send notifications of such filings to all counsel of record.

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